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SUBJECT: IRAQI CHARGE IN ABU DHABI UPBEAT ON RELATIONS

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Douglas Greene, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(C) The Iraqi Charge to the UAE (in the job for a few months) gave POL Chief an upbeat assessment of Iraq's bilateral relations with the UAE on April 28. Intisar F. al-Dawdi, a well-spoken (in Arabic) diplomat who claims over 20 years at the Iraqi MFA, says this is her first overseas assignment (stating the prior regime restricted female MFA personnel to Baghdad). She had no information on the eventual naming of an Iraqi Ambassador, yet gave the following views about her work and UAE-Iraq relations.

--- Communications between the Iraqi MFA and the Embassy are good and she feels like her Mission is appropriately resourced and staffed (with 11 people, some hired locally). (Note: This is in sharp contrast to her predecessor, who routinely noted the lack of clear direction and staffing support from Baghdad and may reflect Ms. al-Dawdi's desire to put a good face on her Mission. End note.) She noted the importance of "quality" staffing as opposed to simple quantity as a key concern throughout the Iraqi MFA.

--- The new Iraqi chancery and ambassador's residence under construction in the Embassies Area of Abu Dhabi should be ready for occupancy in September and is fully-funded by the GoI. (She again asserted that resources are ample to the task and insisted that the UAEG was not lending financial support to Embassy construction, although the UAEG had negotiated a land swap in exchange for space to build its Embassy in Baghdad. One MFA official has implied that the UAEG may be assisting with construction costs.)

--- She recalled the steps the UAEG has taken in support of Iraq and claimed her access to the UAEG is excellent. Evidence of positive ties included the UAE having been the first: 1) Arab Foreign Minister to visit Baghdad, 2) Arab country to forgive Iraqi debt, and 3) Arab nation to staff up an Embassy. She said there are no outstanding issues with debt forgiveness, asserting that all paperwork is finalized and Iraq's burden has been lifted in that regard. Her impression of the UAE Ambassador in Baghdad was that he is actively and purposefully engaged with the GoI, although the staffing and facilities of the UAE Mission are still a work in progress.

--- She gave a characteristic review of the need for Iraq to overcome sectarianism and solidify stability. In spite of (previous and recent) reports of violence in Iraq the people have no choice but to go on about life and make what improvements they can -- she chose to be optimistic.

--- Regarding recent press reports about an agreement between the UAE (Abu Dhabi Police under direction of the Minister of Interior) to train Iraqi police, she said that is a minor training opportunity for only 20 "community police" and had been exaggerated in the media. (The Ministry of Interior similarly downplayed the importance of this program in a separate conversation with Pol Chief.)

--- UAE investments in Baghdad are encouraging, with some focus on the development of "Camp Rasheed" (apparently a new commercial area) near Baghdad.

--- Estimates of the number of Iraqis in the UAE vary from well over 140,000, to about 75,000 clearly-identified long-term residents.

Some, but the Charge suggested not so many, are involved in business enterprises involving Iraq.

--- One of the Iraqi Mission's primary frustrations is visas for Iraqis to enter the UAE. She said this was not a new trend, but a continuing challenge of some years standing. Rather than complain, she acknowledged security-related concerns that likely drive the UAEG policy.

--- The Charge was upbeat on U.S.-Iraq relations as well.
GREENE